

FireFighter

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August/September 2009

TRAGEDY AT DALRY ROAD, EDINBURGH



Ewan Williamson – a terrible and tragic



It is with great sadness that we once again mark the death of one of our members on duty. Ewan Williamson was killed attending the fire at Dalry Road, Edinburgh on 12 July. This death has again touched all of us working in the Fire and Rescue Service. I know that the thoughts of all of us will have been with Ewan's family, friends and colleagues following this terrible tragedy. In the aftermath of the fire I was struck by the dignity displayed by Ewan's family in dealing with their loss. During the following week, I was also able to visit some of the

crews involved in the incident and I hope that the support of other firefighters throughout the UK will provide some comfort at what is a truly terrible time.

At such a time the Union has a whole range of responsibilities: to Ewan's family; to colleagues who attended the incident; and to all firefighters in terms of learning lessons. This ranges from providing support and advice, to legal assistance and representation to investigating the incident so as to learn the lessons.

This incident has once again brought home the risks facing firefighters and it is essential that this incident, like all deaths at work, is investigated thoroughly. We

have already put in place the measures to ensure that this is done and I want to thank the FBU officials in Lothian and Borders and in the Scottish region for moving so quickly and efficiently despite the difficulties. Nationally, the Union is also providing whatever support is necessary. Sadly we have had all too much experience in recent years and have been able to move quickly to do what is necessary.

Such incidents take a bitter toll on all those involved. It is essential that our members take every effort to look after each other in the aftermath of a death at work. Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service have put measures in

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Bogota firefighter and trade unionist Luis Arguello – with assassinations in his country continuing at a rate of one a week, solidarity with trade unionists in Colombia is crucial

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

loss

place to provide support and counselling as necessary and these should be taken up whenever needed. The support of colleagues at work is also essential to being able to come to terms with such a loss. The fire service is based on team work. Our watches, our colleagues are the first point of support at work in such times and we should all value that support and comradeship.

For firefighters in Lothian and Borders, and for all of us, Ewan is gone but not forgotten. As with all our colleagues lost – in recent years or longer ago – we will remember him.

Matt Wrack



General Secretary Matt Wrack and Ewan's work colleagues lay a wreath



20

Tony Maguire stands in front of a house from which racist mobs drove out Roma families

OBITUARY

Enoch Humphries

Born in Rutherglen, South Lanarkshire, in a two-bed apartment, Enoch left school at 14, taking several jobs – the last as cellerman for a whisky firm – before joining the RAF to serve in the Second World War.

After demobilisation he joined the fire service in Glasgow, becoming a member of the FBU at the same time. This was also the period when Enoch married Margaret, whom he had met while they were both in the RAF. They became the most devoted of couples over 63 years.

Enoch became a delegate to the area committee. In 1949 he was elected area secretary of Glasgow.

Enoch was heavily influenced by John Horner, the General Secretary of the Union at the time, and a member of the Communist Party, which Enoch himself joined in 1948.

Like Horner, Enoch had a wider view of politics than just the pay and conditions of firefighters: he was involved in campaigns around the Cold War and had a strong commitment international solidarity. In 1964 when Horner resigned to take up a seat in Parliament, Enoch stood for General Secretary and came second, 2,000 votes short of Terry Parry.

FBU President from 1964–1977, Enoch and Terry Parry – sharing a background in the forces and a rejection of the discipline and drudgery of jobs firefighters had to put up with – were close and cooperative from the start. By the late 1960s, following the 'spit and polish' campaign, they

had persuaded the Government and National Employers that firefighters should be engaged in fire prevention inspections but the duties they had previously been involved in, such as cleaning, should be the work of people specifically employed for those purposes.

Enoch treated all people the same – whether you were the Home Secretary or an employer. He didn't hesitate to let them know that firefighters and pensioners had been treated shoddily over the years and what they should do to put that right.

Enoch served as STUC President in 1968 and he only retired from the STUC General Council when he retired from the fire service in September 1977. He then became active in the Scottish pensioners movement.

Enoch remained true to his principles right up to the end. In donating his body to medical science he proved that even in death he would unselfishly go on helping others.

Enoch Humphries died, 86, 1 July 2009, born September 25 1922.

Ken Cameron

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London firefighters on strike in 2002/3 – the FBU says the capital fire authority's new force will not provide a service for the public

Strikebreaking force will cost £12m

LONDON

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) has awarded a contract for the country's first private "strike-breaking force" fire service. The £12 million five-year contract will see up to 700 staff – reportedly to be trained by Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue – provided by AssetCo plc.

The move to establish what the stock market listed company calls a "contingency firefighting service" comes as London FBU prepares to ballot members over industrial action on a range of imposed changes to working conditions.

AssetCo, which already owns, maintains

and "manages" all of London Fire Brigade's frontline FRS vehicles and operational equipment under a 20-year Private Finance Initiative contract, has told the *Financial Times* newspaper that it was hopeful this will be just the first of a series of contracts with brigades across the UK.

G4S, a private security group, explored setting up what the FBU labelled a nationwide "dads' army" last year but the proposed £100m, 10-year contract fell apart after funding disputes among fire authorities – and opposition from the FBU.

The workers will be employed by Reliance, an Uxbridge-based private security firm, and seconded to AssetCo on

a temporary basis, attracting additional fees on top of the £12m contract, according to the *Financial Times*.

Brian Coleman, LFEPA chief, claimed that AssetCo would provide 27 appliances, "fully crewed, fully trained to professional standards, to keep at least some cover should there be a strike or a flu pandemic or any other reason why a sizeable number of our firefighters can't or won't come to work. Many of the staff will be recently retired firefighters," he added.

Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark described it as a "strike breaking force of untrained people who would not be providing a service for the public".

Cuts talks are cut short after just six minutes

ESSEX

Essex FBU is “puzzled and disappointed” that fire service managers ended negotiations after only six minutes on 14 July. Talks started at 8am with what the FBU intended to be the first of a series of meetings to resolve a lawful trade dispute. At six minutes past eight senior managers said the meeting was over and asked the FBU reps to leave.

Essex FBU Chair Keith Flynn said: “The meeting started with the chief officer setting out the view of the fire authority. We set out our views. When it was clear those views differed the meeting was brought to a halt.

“We are concerned that the Essex Fire Authority does not appear to recognise that the only way of resolving this dispute is to engage in meaningful discussions at meetings.”

The Union repeated its proposal for a joint review of changes across all areas of the service – made by agreement,



not simply imposed.

“We are happy to work jointly with the Essex Fire Authority and look at where genuine savings can be made that protect the frontline service as the priority,” said Keith Flynn. There were plenty of alternatives to cuts in frontline fire crews, he said.

The authority plans a rolling programme of cuts to the emergency response service. The result would leave too few firefighters on duty to crew all the fire engines.

The authority proposes to cut the number of firefighters

by “managed vacancies” from 954 firefighters in December 2008, to an average of 940 during 2008/9, to 920 during 2009/10, to 905 in March 2010.

Forty four of those jobs – one in ten of frontline station based crews – would go by changing the way ALPs and rescue tenders are crewed, leaving too few firefighters to crew appliances.

The Union has also objected to a number of other changes that it says local managers are trying to impose rather than negotiate. A ballot for industrial action was launched on 8 July.

South Yorks members up action

CUTS FIGHTBACK

South Yorkshire FBU members are intensifying industrial action by refusing to do any detached duties in response to their fire authority's decision to sack 744 firefighters on 1 January 2010 if they will not accept changes to their contracts of employment.

FBU members are already refusing to do pre-arranged overtime, following a 3:1 vote in favour of action short of strike action.

The fire authority's move – notified via fax on 30 June – is the first time mass sackings have been attempted in the fire service. The authority made the decision on 29 June with the public and media excluded. The FBU was not notified that the matter was to be discussed.

The underlying dispute is about shift changes sought by the fire authority which wants firefighters to work four consecutive shifts of 12 hours. At every stage it has sought to impose changes rather than negotiate – tactics which went down badly with FBU members.

If unchallenged by the FBU, there would be longer day shifts of 12 hours, up from the current nine hours, and changes to start and finish times. FBU members say the changes will damage family life and cause problems with childcare.

→ If you are a South Yorkshire member, please attend your branch meetings and write to, or email your local councillors, including those on the fire authority, and MPs, to voice your opposition to these bully-boy tactics.

Sounding off!

DAVID SUGDEN

Chair
Passive Fire Protection Federation

Camberwell fire and fire safety order

The tragic fire in Lakanal House in Camberwell, south London, shows how lives can suddenly be lost when fire breaks out. The owners and regulators must establish swiftly what happened and what went wrong. The rapid spread of fire and the way in which it spread is surprising. It prompts questions about the quality of built-in or ‘passive’ fire protection that is present in all buildings.

Passive fire protection is based on designing or modifying a building to stop fire spreading beyond its point of origin. It is the foundation for all other aspects of fire safety: keeping a building standing during fire, allowing people time to escape and firefighters to get in. Clearly, in Camberwell



Firefighters at Lakanal House in Camberwell, south London, where six people died on 3 July

something went wrong.

Speculation about the cause and the details is premature and unhelpful at this stage. However, Lakanal House is a 1960s block and, while building regulations at the time of construction were not the same as today's, we do have ample fire safety legislation that applies to existing and new buildings.

We are told that there was an extensive recent refurbishment of Lakanal House and details of this will be part of the investigation, the results of which should be made public. This will show whether the measures taken were appropriate, of the correct quality and could be expected to work.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 passed the responsibility for fire safety to the owners and operators of buildings, who are personally and criminally liable. They have a duty of care to inform themselves of the requirements – this responsibility was always there for most businesses under the workplace regulations. Yet many building occupiers have never even heard of passive fire protection and the guidance given to them on this is inadequate.

Until this changes, we can only expect more tragedies.

See also page 12

FBU helps member to win £250,000 compensation

LEGAL SERVICES

A firefighter who suffered extensive injuries when he fell down a 20ft pit while trying to put out a blaze has received £250,000 in compensation. The FBU member received the accidents compensation after he attended a fire at Sigmacast Iron Ltd in Cardiff in September 2004. The firm makes iron castings for the car industry. The Cardiff-based firefighter was walking through the building with an employee of the firm to find the best way to tackle the fire when he fell down a 20ft deep unguarded pit containing a mixture of oil, water and discarded steel parts. The 33-year-old broke his left wrist, right elbow, received a puncture injury to his leg and ruptured ligaments in his left knee.

It took almost two years to recover from his injuries and when he returned to work in June 2006 he had to undertake light duties for a short period. Three years later he is now able to work as a fully operational watch manager, but is concerned how his injuries may affect his work in the future.

Following the accident he contacted the FBU, which instructed its lawyers Thompsons Solicitors to pursue a claim for compensation. Signmacast Iron Ltd admitted liability and settled the claim out of court.

The compensation included damages for pain and suffering, loss of the opportunity for promotion and full earning capacity. A proportion of wages and medical care provided by the fire service was refunded to the service.

In brief

◆ During Hitler's blitz in the second world war, more than 400 Canadian firefighters volunteered to come to Britain and help fight fires caused by German bombs. Last month, Canadian union leaders were in London, paying tribute to their countrymen, and especially the three who were killed. FBU president Mick Shaw (right) joined Alex Forrest, trustee of the International Association of Fire Fighters (centre), and Manitoba's Minister for Emergency Measures, Steve Ashton, to lay a wreath at the firefighters' memorial by St Paul's Cathedral.



◆ Government should review current regulations to require that in future all new homes are fitted with a domestic sprinkler system, says an Early Day Motion tabled in the Westminster parliament. EDM 1844 – Domestic Sprinklers, notes that "domestic sprinklers are the equivalent of having a firefighter, ready and waiting, in every room of a home". FBU members are urged to contact their MPs to ask them to sign EDM 1844.

◆ The Government should work with the FBU to develop a strategy to tackle assaults on firefighters which would require all fire authorities to put in place plans to prevent attacks, to standardise collection of statistics, to introduce conflict resolution training where attacks cannot be avoided and to conduct awareness campaigns that challenge attacks, according to more than 50 MPs who have signed an early day motion (EDM) tabled in the Westminster parliament. FBU members are urged to contact their MPs to ask them to sign EDM 1742 Assaults on Fire Crews.

MARTIN JENNINSON



Participants at last year's school

Apply now while places are left!

G&L SCHOOL

Book your trade union leave and fire off an application form now for the FBU's National G&L School while there are still places left. The school, held over the weekend of October 16–18 October in Wortley Hall, near Sheffield, is a must if you

are LGBT and working in the fire service. It's a mixture of education, sharing of information and experience, meeting new people and finding out what the FBU can do for you. You do not need to have any active union experience to attend the school. We welcome everyone's contribution. Travelling expenses will be

covered, accommodation and meals are provided for you and the crèche facility is excellent.

→ For more information and an application form contact Yannick Dubois, chair, National Gay and Lesbian Committee at yannick.dubois@fbu.org.uk or tel: 07824 319 545. Application forms are also available online at www.fbulgbt.org.uk

FBUTUBE
www.youtube.com/fbutube

For more on attacks on firefighters

Justice for Colombia

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

When FBU President Mick Shaw joined a delegation of UK trades unionists, MPs and lawyers to Colombia earlier this year, what he heard from the local people was grimly familiar: Assassinations of trade unionists, human rights lawyers, peasant campaigners and other opponents of the Colombian Government. And the right-wing paramilitary groups carrying out these executions operate with almost total impunity – indeed they enjoy links with the Government.

Killings by paramilitaries in Colombia are currently running at one a week – and as *Firefighter* went to press there was yet more bad news. Pablo Rodriguez Garavito and Jorge Humberto Echaverri Garro – both teachers and members of the Arauca teachers association – and Rafael Antonio Sepulveda Lara, an activist of the national hospital workers' union and a member of the national executive of the public servants federation, had been murdered.

These murders occurred during and just after the International Labour Conference – the annual meeting of the International Labour Organisation – at which the Colombian government was at great pains to highlight the so called dramatic fall in the number of trade unionists being assassinated. Tragically the facts on the ground continue to contradict the figures produced by the Colombian government.

Nobody has been arrested in any of the above cases, adding these to the thousands of others in which trade unionists have been assassinated and the perpetrators allowed to escape with impunity.



Mick Shaw meets up with Colombian firefighters in Bogotá

Standing up for your rights and the rights of people you represent is a lethal undertaking in the South American country. Says Mick of the visit in April: "Our delegation were accompanied everywhere by armed guards, which is a way of life for Colombian trade union leaders and opposition politicians.

Constant armed guard

"We visited the house of an opposition senator, Wilson Borja, a former president of the major public employees' union, who has constant armed guards stationed at his house and accompanying him everywhere he goes." This is with good reason, says Mick, as in December 2000 he was subject to an assassination attempt in which he was shot three times and ended up seeking sanctuary in Cuba, where he was provided with extensive medical treatment to re-build his shattered leg.

"Despite this, workers continue to organise in unions; peasants continue to campaign for land and their rights; and human rights campaigners continue to campaign against extra-judicial killings and unjust imprisonment. The obstacles and dangers that they face mean that the courage they need to possess in order to continue is truly humbling to visitors from countries such as our own."

Among those workers uncowed and organising are firefighters. As part of his visit in April, Mick met up with two former guests of FBU Annual Conference – Euclides Mancipe Tabares and Luis Arguello Martinez from the Colombian firefighters' union. Visiting fire stations in Bogota, he saw the challenges their members face first hand and their efforts to establish a national union in an incredibly difficult climate.

"If any FBU member doubted the value of the FBU's links with and assistance to trade unions in other countries, or the need for us to continue to support organisations such as Justice for Colombia, a visit to see our brothers and sisters in Colombia would soon clear up those doubts," says Mick.

"It is of the utmost importance that as trade unionists here in the UK we continue to support and publicise the work of Justice for Colombia and add our weight to the calls for the UK Government to stop military aid and to oppose favourable trade terms for the Colombian government until they take action to stop the repression of trade unionists."

→ Find out more and what you can do: www.justiceforcolombia.org.

→ Read more about Mick Shaw's visit to Colombia: www.fbu.org.uk/campaigns/international/columbia.php



Firefighter at Bosa fire station, south Bogotá

Making IRMPs work for safety

ANDY DARK, ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY

Following the report carried in the last edition of *Firefighter*, the Union's new publication *The Framework Document: How to construct an IRMP/RRP* has now been printed, and will be arriving with officials shortly.

As the General Secretary states within the introduction "... other than the brief notes provided by governments, there has been a lamentable lack of guidance on what integrated risk management planning is, and how it should be carried out. The FBU feels strongly that this is damaging the UK fire and rescue service.

"Since no other stakeholder has been willing to step forward to fill this knowledge gap, as the UK's leading organisation for fire

and rescue practitioners, the FBU felt obliged to step forward. The FBU has dedicated a considerable amount of resources into researching all aspects of IRMP that has culminated in the publication of this IRMP Framework Document."

The FBU's 2009 Framework Document is a valuable tool to fill that vacuum left by ministers and civil servants, and represents the latest example of the FBU's commitment to making the IRMP process work in the interests of public and firefighter safety.

The FBU's document will supplement the FBU's national IRMP document launched in May 2004. That excellent piece of work, based largely on the Review of Standards of Emergency Cover, developed a strategy

for FBU officials to promote within fire and rescue services. For emergency response, the FBU recommended the development of critical attendance standards (CAST) and minimum attendance times for speed and weight of resources to deal with emergencies safely and effectively.

Early in 2004, the FBU established an IRMP Board, which is led by the Assistant General Secretary and supported by National Officers and Executive Council members. The FBU also established an IRMP Department, and appointed an IRMP Adviser and Regional IRMP Co-Ordinators.

The Regional Co-Ordinators working alongside other officials at all levels, have, throughout the last five years, worked



extremely hard to explain to Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and members of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), their statutory obligations when considering their integrated risk management plan, and how it should be reported to the public.

Our Co-Ordinators have in many cases been successful in this. However, in the majority of cases, FRSs and FRAs have chosen instead to produce glossy pamphlets which are nothing more than meaningless mission statements and wish lists, rather than a plan of how they intend to achieve the management of or reductions in fires and other risks, underpinned by professional analysis and evaluation and risk.

To be frank, when it comes to IRMP,

despite the best efforts of the work carried out by our officials, those who are paid to run the fire service just don't get it. Instead of spending time concerning themselves with peripheral and unnecessary "initiatives", such as changing duty systems – which are neither demanded nor wanted – by the public or firefighters alike, government and fire and rescue authorities should have been attempting, at least, to get to grips with what they are required to do.


After five years, there are signs that the service is beginning to wake up to the fact that the change-agenda pushed by the CLG (at the time ODPM) has been a failure.

In tandem with the 2004 FBU National IRMP document, our new framework

document presents an opportunity for FRAs to start getting it right. It is a comprehensive document which at first glance, may appear challenging. Effectively written, it presents quite technical information and concepts in a very logical and understandable way.

The Union will shortly be providing training and familiarisation events, to ensure that it is fully understood.

This important work is being developed by the FBU's IRMP Adviser, Dave Sibert, and was the subject of extensive consultation with the IRMP Board, regions and the Executive Council.

Like the FBU's National IRMP document, it shall quickly prove to be a landmark publication in the UK Fire and Rescue Service. 





TRAGEDY AT

Ewan Williamson, a Lothian and Borders firefighter, was killed while fighting a pub fire that threatened to claim the lives of many others. His colleagues rescued more than 20 tenants, including a baby, from the multi-storey tenement block above the Balmoral bar in Dalry Road, Edinburgh.

The stark contrast between many lives saved and a life lost in the line of duty will resonate far beyond Ewan's family, friends and work colleagues. They are having to come to terms with his tragic and untimely death, aged just 35, which happened as he was doing the job he loved.

As Kenny Ross, Scotland regional secretary put it: "It is devastating news that we have lost a firefighter colleague in the line of duty. Our thoughts are primarily with his family who will be distraught at the loss of their loved one. His friends and colleagues will also be shocked and distressed. Deaths the line of duty touch everyone who works in the fire service. The death of our colleague in Edinburgh will be felt very deeply by everyone in the service in Scotland and across the UK."

Matt Wrack, who later visited some of the crews involved, said the "terrible news" was "a reminder of just how deadly our profes-

sion can be. Our thoughts are with all our colleagues in fire services across the UK who will be touched by these events. There are no borders to grief and this death will impact on fire crews across the UK." Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue has set up an online site where people can leave their condolences.* The Union has also received many



Ewan Williamson: his death will be felt deeply by everyone in our service

tributes to Ewan from all over the globe.

After the shock of a firefighter fatality inevitably comes the inquiry into events surrounding Ewan's death. It will, it is hoped, identify what happened and why, so that any lessons can be learned.

This fatality was the first death of a firefighter in fire in Edinburgh in living memory. However, in Scotland and across the UK, fatality rates have been rising, a report published by the FBU showed. *In the Line of Duty* warned of an "unprecedented" rise in firefighter deaths, revealing that at least nine service members had died in the line of duty in 2007-8.

FBU health and safety officials at brigade, Scottish and UK levels will be fully involved in a joint accident investigation with Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service and the Health and Safety Executive. Key areas of investigation – which are typical in firefighter fatality investigations – will attempt to establish facts around the incident.

The investigation will look to establish a timeline, mapping the sequence of events, and focus on procedures, training and equipment, the construction of the building and any other relevant matters that emerge.

Andy Fulton, FBU brigade secretary for



Firefighters at the scene after the fire had been extinguished and, below, flowers from the FBU were among the tributes



DOUGLAS ROBERTSON; DANNY LAWSON/PA

DALRY ROAD

Lothian and Borders, said: "The investigation is about establishing the facts and learning lessons for the future. It is not about attributing blame. This is how the fire service keeps on improving public and firefighter safety. Unfortunately almost all of the advances in public and firefighter safety have been as a consequence of such a tragedy. We must and will learn the lessons from this incident."

Roddy Robertson, executive council member for Scotland, took a UK-wide perspective: "Unfortunately, as a union we have had to deal more and more with this kind of tragedy," he said. "This does not make it any easier. Hard questions need to be asked and every effort to learn from this disaster must be taken."

Lothian and Borders control staff, who are located at Tollcross fire station, took the call which mobilised vehicles to the Balmoral blaze, potentially saving more than 20 lives – but cruelly robbing the station of one of its cherished frontline firefighters.

Sixteen vehicles and around 70 firefighters were called out to attend the bar just after half past midnight in the early hours of Sunday July 12. On arriving at the bar, crews were confronted by a "severe" fire, according to Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service. Ewan had entered the burning building on the

ground floor as part of a two-person breathing apparatus team. The fire is believed to have started in the basement, and at some stage the ground floor collapsed. Ewan's colleague was injured, taken to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and later released.

The fire was eventually extinguished just before lunchtime of Sunday, almost 12 hours after the first call.

People in the tenements were extremely grateful to be rescued – some by crews wearing breathing apparatus, wading through smoke, some leaving the building climbing onto fire service ladders, others with the help of turntable ladders.

An eyewitness account plus video clip, posted on the BBC news site, gives a flavour of

the relief and gratitude felt by residents when firefighters came to the rescue. Emily Davies, a 28 year-old student and her 25 year-old boyfriend Andy Greenhaigh were asleep in bed when the fire broke out after pub closing time. Ms Davies told the BBC: "Andy woke up because of the noise with the fire engines. We looked out and there was all this chaos in the street. We got up and when we went into the hall there was all this smoke coming under our door. That's when we started to panic. We shut ourselves in the lounge and had to open the windows just to get some fresh air.

"We were hanging out of the windows basically. The room was starting to fill up with smoke. It was pretty scary. The fire brigade had to get a ladder to us and take us out the window."

For the crews at Ewan Williamson's station, Tollcross, the loss of their colleague will hit hard. Grief was still very raw at Tollcross as *Firefighter* went to press, just a week after the fatal incident. Officials were on hand to support firefighters at Tollcross and other stations, regardless of whether they attended the fire which claimed Ewan's life.

The police are still investigating the site and it is being treated as a potential crime scene.

MEMORIAL FUND

The Ewan Williamson memorial fund will be administered by local FBU officials and other friends of Ewan. All of the money will go to Ewan's family.

Ewan Williamson Memorial Fund
Unity Trust Bank plc
Sort code 08 – 60 – 01
Account No. 33028512

* <http://tinyurl.com/mpakza>

WE MUST HAVE A PUBLIC INQUIRY

The FBU called for a public inquiry into the fatal fire in a London high rise, which claimed six lives. The call, the only one to come from within the fire service, is in the wake of increasing public concern about the fire, some misunderstanding about how firefighters operate and untrue stories in the media.

The blaze that took hold of Lakanal House in Camberwell, London, on 3 July 2009 was huge. At its height there were seven floors alight and 150 firefighters involved.

The first crews – calls started coming into control at 16.19 – arrived from Peckham and Old Kent Road. Then from from Southwark, Brixton, New Cross and Lambeth, and subsequently elsewhere in London. Over 100 firefighters were committed into the high-rise building for search and rescue and fire-fighting. In total, 18 fire engines and a range of special appliances were deployed.

Says one firefighter who attended the incident: “In the first 25 minutes the fire had spread to three floors. The individual flats were a complex layout over two floors. A big problem was that the flats’ internal wooden stairs were either totally destroyed or so badly damaged as to be unusable. We had to get in ladders to get from one part of the flat to the other.

There were other major challenges, such as with the breathing apparatus. Some firefighters used up 40 bars of air just getting up to the area where they were carrying out search and rescue or firefighting.

And then there was problem of making use of the aerial ladder platforms.

Says one firefighter: “Getting the ALPs close enough was a problem. We had two ALPs, one on either side of the building, but there were access problems. The way cars were parked made it difficult to get the ALPs close.”

If they could have got close enough to the building, firefighters might have, in theory, at least have been able to just reach the ninth floor. But, the Union understands that falling debris, burnt out window frames and material from balconies, made this highly dangerous.



Over 100 firefighters took part in firefighting and search and rescue at the south London fire

This, together with restricted vehicle access to the bulk of the outside of the building, made it difficult to operate the ALPs to their full potential. In any event, the deaths occurred above the level ALPs can reach.

Some five hours after the first crews arrived, there were still some small fires. It was finally put out after some 11 hours.

Around 40 people were brought to safety in all – members of the public were still being rescued from the 14-floor block more than two hours after the fire started.

But there was tragedy: six members of the public lost their lives.

In the hours and days that followed the fire, public concern about the turn of events was understandably deep.

Understanding what had happened and how the tragedy occurred was not helped by the media coverage of the incident though – much of it incorrect.

Says Paul Embery, FBU London regional official: “The firefighters involved did everything in their power to limit loss of life and damage to property, just as they always do. The challenges presented by such an unconventional and ferocious fire were probably

CARL COURT/PRESS ASSOCIATION IMAGES



NIGEL SAUNDERS/FR PIX

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "In our professional lives we are all too aware of the traumatic impact fire deaths have on families and communities. London firefighters are devastated by the loss of life and want me to express their deep regret that they did not save everyone.

"Our working lives and training are about saving life and it hurts us deeply when we do not do so. Our thoughts remain with the families and friends of those who have died and with those 40 people who were rescued but have had their lives devastated and traumatised by the fire.

"If there are lessons to be learned then only an open and robust inquiry will identify them. There is no question that there are serious public concerns about what happened and these need to be addressed properly and the facts established.

"No one is ever beyond criticism but some

'No one is beyond criticism but some of the allegations aimed at firefighters are certainly untrue'

beyond what most had ever experienced.

"Yet still they went to the limit in their attempts to assist people. It is pretty contemptible that some of the national media have, through a lack of understanding, sought to question the commitment and professionalism of those firefighters.

"It is worse that, in some cases, they have quoted anonymous sources who claim to be in the know. We should await the outcome of the investigation before making a judgment. We shouldn't rely on ill-thought out and sensationalist reporting."

Three days after the fire the Government announced there would be a review to be led by Sir Ken Knight, the chief fire and rescue adviser for England. The Union welcomed it as "a good start". But it said that alone it will not satisfy the legitimate public concerns which have been raised.

For the FBU, it was clear that there needed to be an inquiry whose proceedings should be open, robust and challenging. Only such an inquiry could satisfy the public's right to know the facts and for those facts to be the basis of recommendations.

A public inquiry should cover all aspects

of the fire service operational planning and response; the fire safety and inspection regime; and the building construction and management, including the issue of refurbishment, alterations and fire-loading, according to the FBU.

On July 9, the Union announced it had written to local MP Harriet Harman, London Mayor Boris Johnson and fire minister Shahid Malik calling for a public inquiry.

The FBU also sought to put the record straight on some of the wildest and, for fire service personnel, most insulting allegations in the press, such as *The Sun* newspaper's allegations (made on the basis of a single phone call from someone claiming to be a firefighter who admitted he wasn't at the fire), that firefighters and officers left five members of the public to die.

Such a serious charge – totally untrue – should never have been made on the basis of such flimsy and unsubstantiated grounds. The Union also criticised *The Guardian* newspaper and other sections of the media for suggesting, incorrectly, significant failings on the part of the firefighters where this was plainly incorrect.

of the allegations being aimed at firefighters are certainly untrue. And some technical and operational issues need to be better explained," said Matt Wrack.

"To claim, as the *Sun* did, that firefighters and officers walked away and left people to die is very serious. It should only have been made if there was clear evidence to support it and there is none."

The Union said it fully understood some of the questions raised about firefighters waiting outside the building ready to be deployed. There are also questions about the use of ladders and there will be others.

"London firefighters and officers understand the need to carefully explain what they did and why they did it. We respect the public's concerns and questions and we will always defend the right for these to be asked at any time whatever the circumstances."

"Fire service procedures are in place, often because hard lessons have been learned from other tragedies at which members of the public and firefighters have been killed or badly injured."

➔ More info: www.fbu.org.uk

Fresh delays add to credibility crisis of FireControl

Further delays mean an England-wide network of regional fire controls will not go live until after the Olympics – and not a single fire service will move to the new system until after the General Election. The Tories have pledged to scrap the project



FBU members within fire controls and the wider fire service know that FireControl is not the way to achieve a professional, resilient fire service

It is official. Thanks to continuing problems with the technology, an England-wide network of regional controls will not go live until after the Olympics. This latest "rescheduling" of FireControl – the union expects a delay of 10 months – will also mean no fire service will move to the new system until the May 2011 at the earliest, after the General Election. And that news, say the Conservatives, allows them to commit any incoming Tory Government to scrapping it.

The FBU immediately reiterated its call for the project to be scrapped and welcomed the Tories' commitment to bin it. Said Sharon Riley, Executive Council member for control staff: "The FBU's opposition to the Government's FiReControl project is well known. Our members within fire controls and the wider fire service know that it is not the way to achieve a professional, resilient emergency fire control service.

"The Conservative Party's announcement that any incoming Tory Government will scrap the project is welcomed by the FBU and indeed the minister's statement that the

'FiReControl is a complex project that involves significant change to operating practices in the FRS'

project has been beset by even more delays makes it extremely unlikely that it will be delivered at all.

"Given the increasing costs and negative savings, what the FBU would urge the Conservative Party to do now is to look again at our alternative to the FiReControl project – resilience controls – and work with stakeholders from across the fire service to ensure that we continue to deliver and build upon the first class service provided by emergency fire controls across England."

These latest delays, announced by the new fire minister Shahid Malik in a ministerial statement on 15 July, mean the cutover date for four brigades, including Kent, will be no sooner than November 2012. But such an arrangement during the Olympic period would be "robust," the Government claims.

The latest rescheduling adds to the nine months of delays the Government announced last November, when it also cited problems with the technology, problems that remain unresolved.

The last business case put the project costs at £1.4 billion and rising, there will be no savings and no genuine timetable for completion.

Indeed, despite describing the latest timetable for roll-out as "realistic," the department

Early Day Motion 1800 LOBBY YOUR MP

More than 70 MPs from across the parties have signed Early Day Motion 1800 calling for the project to be halted. Write to you MP today. It takes two minutes. Visit www.fbu.org.uk and follow the "Lobby Your MP" link.



for Communities and Local Government is still calling it "provisional".

In 2004 the Government promised a state of the art control system would be in place by 2007 and originally estimated the cost at £100 million. It would save so much money, the Government claimed, it would pay for itself within five years.

Shahid Malik said that "in recent months it has become clear that technical problems with developing the IT system in a way that will meet all our and FRS requirements mean that further time is needed to complete the project."

He added: "We are not making progress as swiftly as expected which is why I'm announcing today that spring 2011 is the new date for the start of the process of moving the 46 FRS control rooms to the new control centres."

"We have discussed [the further delays] in detail with the representatives of FRSs and local government, and we believe that this is a realistic timetable. Key Olympic authorities will switch over in time to prepare for the games, and the network will provide robust fall-back arrangements for all FRSs over the Olympic period."

Just how detailed and inclusive those discussions were remains to be seen. The Government has announced that it will cut-over in September 2011 but this contradicts statements by senior officials from London Fire and Emergency Planning

Authority at a recent ministerial meeting the FBU attended. At that meeting they stated they would not be cutting over until after the Games.

Shahid Malik said his department will be "updating" the cost figures in the FiReControl Business Case "in due course" to take into account the "rescheduling." But he still insisted that "once the new network is established, many FRAs are expected to make savings."

The Union says the delays will leave the Government paying another £15 million in rents to keep the new regional control centres (RCCs) empty for longer. There will be more to pay for the army of consultants, civil servants and project managers needed to try to deliver the project pushing the costs of the delay, the Union estimates, above £30 million.

The Conservatives reacted to the news that none of the RCCs will be operational before the General Election, by vowing that any incoming Tory government would scrap the project.

Stewart Jackson, Shadow Minister for Fire Services, said: "This is a further blow to the credibility of Labour's plans to regionalise the fire service. It is sadly no surprise that yet another Government IT project is over-budget and behind schedule. The latest delays will allow an incoming Conservative Government to scrap this bloated project, and fire authorities and contractors should take note. We do not need regionalisation of the fire service to improve civil resilience and adopt the latest technology."

The announcement of new delays will have surprised few in a fire service that is increasingly united in its rejection of FireControl. Many will not have expected and will likely be extremely concerned, however, by what appears to be a hidden bombshell in Shahid Malik's statement: for the first time, the Government has talked of radical changes, not only in control, but apparently to the way the whole fire service operates. "FiReControl," he said, "is a complex project that involves significant change to operating practices in the FRS, as well as the development and installation of a major new national IT system."

JOIN THE LOBBY & RALLY 21 OCT

The Union is organising a rally and lobby of the Westminster Parliament for 21 October. It will be highlighting the dangers and our total opposition to the regional controls project as well as the wider threats to FBU members' jobs, pay and conditions. Make sure you attend and get your views across to your constituency MP.



WHAT'S MY ROLE?

Jess Hurd, *Firefighter* photographer

As a young girl, Jess Hurd had her heart set on being either a firefighter or a journalist when she grew up. But she had to wear glasses and thought her less than perfect eyesight would stop her making it as a frontline firefighter. So she took the other path. The way she sees the world has shaped her career as an award-winning campaigning photojournalist.

But she has managed to link up with firefighters through her chosen profession. She loves working alongside fire crews and has taken shots at a good few 'shouts' and FBU campaigns. Her images appear in *Firefighter* – and, it must be said, a great many other places too – from union journals to international magazines. She's got an exhibition of the G20 protests at the Edinburgh festival, and her work was on show at the National Theatre as *Firefighter* went to press.

But you won't find Jess's pictures of anti-capitalist protestors, asylum seekers or workers in struggle in the *Sun* or *Daily Mail*. Reportdigital – the ethical photo library to which she contributes – does not sell images to the rightwing press. "I do a lot of work with asylum seekers and travellers and trade unionists," says Jess. "They can all be vastly misrepresented, so you have to be careful who you sell to and bear in mind what kind of headline or caption might be used."

Jess is based in East London and travels where the struggles, conflicts and grassroots global protests are to take the pictures that need to be shown. She was at the G8 Summit in Aquila in Italy this summer, went to Africa for ActionAid for Make Poverty History and the *Firefighter* has carried images she's shot in Iraq, Venezuela and Colombia.

Raft of awards

She's spent time in Southern California, near the US Mexican border – one of the most dangerous places for migrants trying to escape poverty. And she's travelled to Iraq with the Stop the War Coalition, interviewing trade unionists about the impact of the conflict. Her image of Baghdad oil workers taken on that trip won a TUC award for best photograph. Her image of the body of anti-globalisation protester Carlo Giuliani in Genoa in 2001 won a raft of awards and has been shown in the National Portrait Gallery.

Jess is active in the NUJ and a passionate advocate of press freedom – with a very personal stake in the freedom for photographers to capture and document dissent and protest. This has come under increasing threat in the UK, following restrictive new laws over the past decade.

And it does not just affect journalists and photographers, Jess warns. "Anyone with a camera is now seen as a potential terrorist." The National Union of Journalists has launched



SKILLS AND TIPS REQUIRED BY A

- ◆ Be aware of the environment you are working in: Whether it is a war zone or a public demonstration, risk assessment and pre-planning is very important. The events surrounding G20 protests in London prove the wisdom of wearing protective headgear and clothing. Carry a basic first aid kit to help injured colleagues.
- ◆ Project management skills: getting enough commissions in the bag to fund trips can sound like a good idea. But you can always pitch afterwards and sell through a trusted agency. It's harder for those just starting



Risk assessment is important: Jess Hurd struggles to get a shot at a G20 demonstration



Always carry a basic first aid kit: Jess Hurd bandages a man with an open wound at the 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais

JUSTIN TALLIS

JUSTIN TALLIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



PAUL BOX

a campaign. "I'm a Photographer Not a Terrorist." Jess was among a mass gathering of photographers taking pictures outside New Scotland Yard this spring. "We got international coverage and I was on the BBC and London Tonight saying how ridiculously these laws are applied and how it impacts on all our civil liberties. We are documenting dissent and we're getting harassed and stopped and monitored. It affects every trade unionist and every citizen."

Jess knows of what she speaks. She found herself detained by the police under section 44 of the Terrorism Act when photographing and videoing a traveller wedding reception in London's docklands. "They said I could be doing hostile reconnaissance. I said 'I'm here filming a wedding'. I have made a complaint." That it happened on UN Human Rights Day and the travellers were about to be evicted from their camp in Essex gave the story an added piquancy. Jess's pictures of the wedding appeared in the Guardian, and her own detainment became part of the story.

She has already got an apology from the one police force. She was stopped and searched three times in a day and detained for two hours when covering the climate change camp at Kingsnorth in Kent last summer.

Police behaviour

"They took my press card off me. I was with some other photographers and they followed us all down to the restaurant and filmed us through a window," says Jess. "It was crazy. Apologies are fine, but what we really need is a change in police behaviour."

Jess is amazingly prolific – working for a raft of union journals and documenting the global political grassroots. She's covered the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and urban social movements in Brazil, India, China and Africa.

Then there's the Gaza protests, anti-BNP campaigns, Calais refugees – and the odd fire crew shout or shoot at the FBU Women's National school at Wortley Hall, the workers' stately home. *Firefighter* won the Best Magazine 2009 award at the TUC recently (see right), and the judges praised "dramatic photos used to good effect." Jess and Reportdigital photographers John Harris, Stefano Cagnoni and Paul Box all made a contribution.

Jess has not been charged or bailed to appear in court or imprisoned yet for doing her job, and hopes she won't be. But she certainly won't stop speaking out against attempts to curb press freedom and the right to protest. For a campaigning photojournalist and NUJ activist, it could be part of the job description.

→ To see Jess' work visit www.jesshurd.com and www.reportdigital.co.uk
Read Jess' blog at: www.jesshurd.blogspot.com

FIREFIGHTER WINS TUC'S AWARD FOR BEST MAGAZINE

Firefighter has won the Best Magazine award in the TUC/Bank of Scotland Trade Union Communications Awards. According to the judges, "*Firefighter* sets out to enthuse, inform, educate, organise and entertain, and it does so in spades. The magazine depicts an active, dynamic union through an interesting variety of features, passionate regular columns, fire brigade gossip and an authoritative use of 'members voice' throughout. The design is clear and dramatic photos are used to good effect. A truly excellent read."

The FBU also won plaudits for FBU-TUBE, which, under the "best use of e-communications" award was "highly commended" for a "good use of YouTube to enable members to share their activities and get the FBU message across. The videos are well produced, pithy and tight, despite being made on a limited budget."

Our report on attacks on firefighters, "Easy Targets", was commended in the best one-off publication category as a "powerful research report that was successful in generating considerable media interest. Shocking statistics from the Labour Research Department are supported by equally shocking real life stories. The layout is clean and clear, with imaginative page furniture that ensures the amount of information conveyed never overwhelms. Photos are used to great effect."

And finally, the "Safer Firefighters; Safer Communities" campaign was highly commended in the "Best Campaign" category for having "a clear set of objectives and outcomes" to "enact action among opinion formers and decision makers." The report was "excellently presented and researched" and its recommendations formed the basis of a "superlative lobby of Parliament, backed by strong member participation". It was a "well resourced campaign that achieved its objectives on a hugely important issue."



Celebrating at the TUC awards (left to right): Tom Gill, Jess Hurd, Matt Wrack, Anna Zych, Lisa Irving (designer), Duncan Milligan and Helen Hague (journalist). The FBU Research and Communications department would like to thank Alan Miles, Satoshi Kambayashi, Labour Research Department, Edition Periodicals and College Hill printers, who are not pictured, for their part in making FBU publications the quality recognised in the TUC awards.

CAMPAIGNING PHOTOJOURNALIST

out, but you will build your reputation as you gain more experience.

- ◆ You don't have to have empathy with the global political grassroots to be a photojournalist. But, if you see yourself as part of the wider movement, that world view will inform how you act. Be true to yourself and act as your conscience dictates. Or, as Jess puts it: "Telling it as you see it is as much as you can do really. You make choices all the time – choosing where to go, what to photograph and who to sell to. It's all political."

Take the plunge

Healthy, fun and the only sport that's a life-saver

SWIMMING

Swimming is great for your health, it's a fun activity and most importantly it's the only sport that can save your life.

You'll often hear people say that swimming is the best exercise and there are many scientific reasons why swimming is such an excellent way to get and stay active. The pressure and resistance of the water makes your body work that little bit harder so 30 minutes of activity in the water is worth 45 minutes of the same activity on land and steady paced lane swimming can burn over 400 calories per hour.

The water also takes the swimmer's weight, so swimming can be great for those who want low impact exercise, including those who have mobility problems, are undergoing rehabilitation or want to protect their joints.

Being in the water can have great psychological benefits too. Studies have shown that swimmers report significantly less tension, depression, anger, confusion, and more vigour after a swim – something Olympic Gold medallist Duncan Goodhew recognises. He said: "The feeling of the water on your skin, the sounds, the smells, it leaves you feeling so good and it's a great motivator."

But swimming isn't just about fitness. The ASA (the national governing body concerned with every element of swimming) wants to encourage people to swim for leisure and fun,

KEY POINTS

- ◆ Swimming is a great all-over workout. It improves strength, flexibility and muscle endurance (including your heart, lungs and balance), can help with weight control and relieves stress and tension.
- ◆ Swimming remains the most popular participation sport in England, with a total of 3.2 million adults saying they swim for 30 minutes at least once a week (Sport England Active People survey).
- ◆ One in five adults across the country can't swim – but it's never too late to learn.

whether alone or with the family. Swimming together is a great family activity and there are exciting family projects going on all over the country.

One of the noisiest projects has been in Lewisham, where the London Community Gospel Choir flooded the pool with music with 'SwimGospel'. People had the chance to access a 45-minute singing lesson, followed by a 30-minute instructor-led swimming class.

Of course, if you have a fear of the water, can't get your face wet or panic just thinking about the deep end, then it's easy to think swimming is not for you.

The important thing to know is that you are not alone. One in five adults across the country can't swim – but it's never too late to learn.

Most pools offer adult classes in a friendly and supportive environment. The best thing to do is contact your local pool for information on lessons for all ages.

Most lessons take things at a slow pace – starting off with teaching you how to stand up and regain your feet, then float and swim without fear before being taught specific strokes.

→ The ASA is the English national governing body for swimming, diving, water polo, open water, and synchronised swimming. It is a governing body providing leadership to the industry of swimming. It supports 1,220 affiliated swimming clubs, organises competition throughout England, from grass-roots to elite level and operates a world renowned Learn to Swim award scheme based on the National Plan for Teaching Swimming. Its main aim is to encourage more people to swim and have fun swimming more often.

→ For more info:

www.swimfit.com – this website, powered by British Gas, offers advice on swimming and provides fun programmes that help structure time in the pool. It's great for you whether you're looking to keep healthy, shape and tone up, improve your fitness or get competitive.

www.britishswimming.org – the Go Swim section has a wealth of information about learning to swim, returning to swimming or even joining a swimming club.

www.everydayswim.org – read the Suffolk Swim Diaries written by former non-swimmers. The diaries detail their experience of learning to swim and will inspire those wanting to learn.



Demotion

Q What are the legal requirements for moving somebody from a higher pay band to a lower one, for example from station manager pay band B to station manager pay band A?

A A brigade cannot simply impose a demotion. There either has to be agreement with the employee, or the demotion must occur as a result of lawful disciplinary action under Section 6 of the Grey Book. Paragraph 52 allows an individual to be demoted either within role, or by no more than one role (although an individual can agree to more than this, presumably as an alternative to dismissal).

It may be possible to take an unfair dismissal claim if it is alleged that the brigade did not act within the terms of the Grey Book in taking the action that it did (for example, because the alleged misconduct did not amount to gross misconduct). In such a case, the safest thing to do is to take the new job and then pursue an unfair dismissal claim within three months of the demotion taking effect.

Criminal records

Q Does a fixed penalty notice need to be declared on an application form for employment?

A Fixed penalty notices are given for less serious offences. The offender is offered the chance to pay a fixed sum of money to court instead of prosecution. As the offence is admitted and the punishment is dealt with by a fine, there is no conviction so this does not go

on a criminal record. Therefore, if a job application form asks if the applicant has any criminal convictions, the fixed penalty does not count as one which would need to be declared.

A check on someone applying for a job where an enhanced disclosure is done at the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) can also include spent convictions, unspent convictions, cautions and warnings and other relevant information held locally by the police, which may include fixed penalty notices.

Q Will a fixed penalty notice be recorded and disclosed in a criminal record check and if so, how long before it becomes spent?

A Fixed penalty notices are not convictions and will not normally show up on standard disclosures. If an enhanced disclosure is done, this can include lots of information held on criminal databases including other relevant information held locally by the police. That could include a fixed penalty notice, for example.

To check what information is held about you on a local police record, you can apply directly to the police station by asking for a subject access check.

A fixed penalty is not a conviction so it therefore does not need to become spent. If the information is held on the police national computer or on local records it can be on there for up to 10 years. To try and get the information removed, you would have to apply to the police force in question and ask if they would remove the information.

Tax problems

Q I have been told by the tax office that I have been on the wrong tax code for the past four years. I have contacted my brigade, which has confirmed this. But it has also confirmed that it was its mistake, as it gave the tax office the wrong code in the first place. Is my employer liable to help me out financially at all?

A It is possible to argue that the brigade has been negligent. However, it is difficult to see what loss the employee has suffered, in strict legal terms. The employee will have had the benefit of extra pay for four years. A court could take the view that that cancels out the cost of, for instance, taking out a loan to pay off the tax arrears now. Nevertheless, you should ask one of your brigade officials to approach the brigade, allege negligence, and ask the brigade to offer the possibility of an interest-free loan, by paying off the arrears for the employee and then allowing the employee to pay them off by deductions from salary over a reasonable period of time.

→ The advice published here is not intended as legal advice on individual cases. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

'We must stand up to bigotry and intolerance'

Equality and diversity were never far from the top of Tony Maguire's agenda when he was FBU regional secretary for Northern Ireland – and that's still the case now he is retired

“ I am really enjoying retirement as I now have time to enjoy family life, holidays, DIY (Destroy it Yourself) and a range of other activities that because of FBU commitments I never had time for.

I was an active FBU member and when I was regional secretary, equality and diversity issues were never very far from the top of the agenda. So when I retired it was only natural that I would continue campaigning and working for the movement, particularly around the issue of anti-racism.

I live in South Belfast where over recent years a large community of migrant workers has settled in the Lisburn Road/University area. At the beginning of June there was a sharp upsurge in racist intimidation and attacks on Roma people.

A small number of racist idiots attacked and threatened members of a family. They terrorised other Roma families by pushing racist literature, including passages from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*,

through letterboxes. A colleague of mine living in the area witnessed an assault on a Roma youth and intervened. He rounded up a number of friends who stayed overnight with the Roma families to show solidarity and offer a degree of protection from the idiots. But it soon became evident that the racist activities would have to be faced down before things got out of control.

120 local people joined us

We leafleted the area to make the community aware of what had happened and to encourage residents to stand up to the racists. On 15 June more than 120 people came out and joined us, standing on the corner of the road to register their support for the local families.

Whilst we were staging our protest we were approached by five young men shouting racist slogans and making the Nazi salute. They launched a hail of bricks and bottles at our protest but we saw them off down a side street before calling the police. Luckily no-one was injured.

The young men who attacked us were in all probability unemployed victims of the economic recession venting their anger at an already disadvantaged minority of people who are economically far worse off than they are. I would dearly welcome an opportunity to sit down with them and explain that, as working class people, they have far more in common with migrant workers than they have with the fascists.

They have accused the Roma men of taking local jobs and claiming handouts from the Social Security. The sad fact is that Romanian people do not enjoy full membership of the EU and with the exception of a food allowance for children under the age of 14 years, the Roma migrants are not entitled to state benefits in Northern Ireland. And Roma men here in Belfast have been largely employed on minimum wage, selling newspapers at traffic intersections and washing cars in all weathers at an outdoor carwash in South Belfast.



Romanians arrive with some of their possessions at the Ozone Leisure Centre in East Belfast in June after being forced to flee their homes following days of racist attacks

CATHAL MCNAUGHTON/REUTERS





TONY MAGUIRE

Tony Maguire retired in February 2008 after 30 years working as a firefighter and crew commander in South Belfast. Having spent a lifetime as a trade unionist – he was latterly FBU regional secretary for Northern Ireland – he sees his continuing anti-racist activity today as a logical extension of the many years working on equality and diversity issues on behalf of members in the fire service and core to his beliefs as a socialist.

I have yet to see any local people taking up these career choices!

I reported the incident to the police straight away but they moved very slowly to deal with the problem. They have taken a hammering in the media for their lack of any robust response to either the intimidation or the attack on the demonstrators. They took a long time to arrive and even then they didn't seem particularly anxious to be involved. They have now got their act together on racist attacks in the South Belfast area. But it is far too late. Since the attacks, 114 members of the Roma community have left the city.

As a trade unionist and a socialist, I feel very strongly about any kind of racism. And as someone who lives in Belfast, I have seen the damage sectarianism has done to our community. I have grown up in a country where irrational hatred, fear and intolerance were allowed to flourish with the result that thousands of lives were tragically lost and many thousands more damaged and destroyed. It would be to our eternal shame if we allowed that madness to get loose again, as racism against migrant workers.

I remain involved in anti-racist activity, even though I'm retired, because I firmly believe, as the Irish statesman Edmund Burke said: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing". I also believe that because of the principles that trade unions were built on, we have an important role to play in raising the profile of anti-racism.

Our role is to send out a beacon of hope

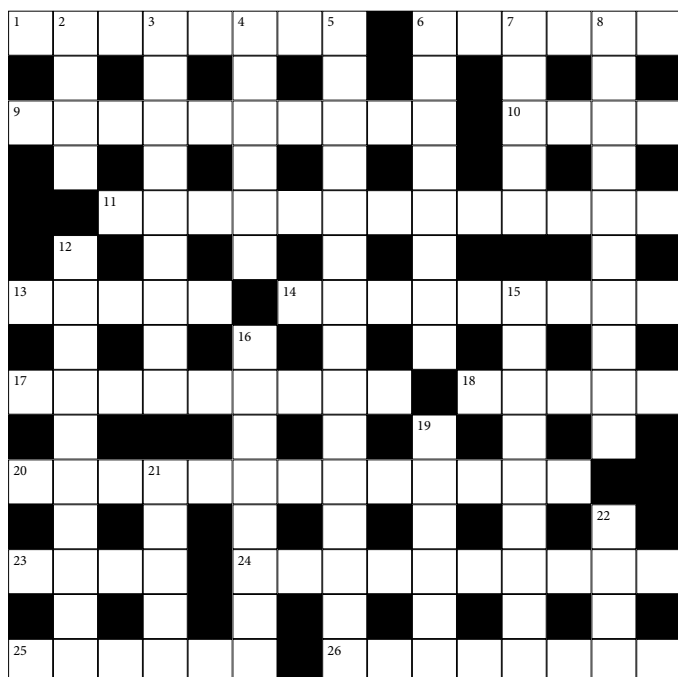
I would like to say that we have control of the problem of racist intimidation. But the tragic fact is that a small minority of misguided fools will always be able to raise the temperature by using cowardly bully-boy methods. The young men who attacked the demonstrators were evidently charged up on hatred and testosterone. But there was nothing to suggest they were representative of anyone in that community but themselves. South Belfast is populated by thousands of decent, honest, hard-working people who are horrified by what the fascists are trying to do.

What we can and must do as working people is join together, stand up and say: 'No' to bigotry and intolerance. We can give confidence and support to minority communities by letting them know that there is a significant section of the Northern Ireland community that opposes racism in all its forms. Our role is to send out a beacon of hope to people by showing that we are opposed to this madness and we are prepared to come out on the streets to make our opposition known. I believe we can make a difference and I will continue to do that for as long as I am able.



Tony Maguire outside one of the South Belfast houses Roma were forced to leave

Quick Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Beer, cider etc made by the consumer (4-4)
- 6 Small tree-climbing marsupial – or fan of Dame Edna? (6)
- 9 Such as Ascot, Aintree, Newmarket etc (10)
- 10 Unwell (4)
- 11 The up-and-down bits at the top of castle walls (13)
- 13 Last bit of the digestive tract; punctuation mark (5)
- 14 Post meridiem (9)
- 17 Recommend course of treatment, for example (9)
- 18 We put them out! (5)
- 20 Things that may be (13)
- 23 Europe's biggest active volcano (4)
- 24 Of sport, in which players must avoid touching each other (3-7)
- 25 Savagely cruel (6)
- 26 Joined up (8)

DOWN

- 2 Precious stone of hydrated silica (4)
- 3 Lifts, in the USA (9)
- 4 Birds' resting places (6)
- 5 Harmony between home and career (4-4,7)
- 6 Ready (8)
- 7 Japanese cuisine involving often raw fish and rice (5)
- 8 Not cut (for moral or any other reason) (10)
- 12 Canopied bed (4-6)
- 15 Small round pieces of meat – or British indie band (9)
- 16 Three-person panel, hears employment cases (8)
- 19 Gentle walk (6)
- 21 Begin; react with surprise (5)
- 22 4,840 square yards (4)

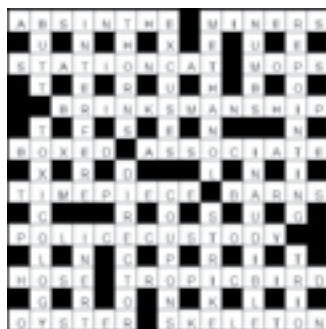
Solution to July 2009 crossword

Winner of the June Firefighter 2009 quiz

Mark Faulkner of Pontefract

Answers to July 2009 quiz

1. c – Sebastian Vettel
2. d – Chelsea
3. a – Netherlands
4. a – 8.5 million euros
5. c – Manny Pacquiao



WIN!
a Trek 3900
mountain bike

Prize quiz

Win a Trek 3900 mountain bike in this issue's labour history themed quiz



1. From what town did 200 men march to London in 1936 to demand action for jobs?

- a. Jarrow
- b. Liverpool
- c. Exmouth
- d. Leeds

2. In what year did Arthur Scargill lead miners into a bitter year long national strike?

- a. 1974
- b. 1984
- c. 1982
- d. 1971

3. From which village were six farm labourers arrested and deported to Australia for trying to start a union?

- a. Taunton

- b. Torquay
- c. Tolpuddle
- d. Torbay

4. What work was done by the 800 women who in 1910 struck for 10 weeks to secure the right to a basic wage?

- a. Laundering
- b. Nursing
- c. Chainmaking
- d. Teaching

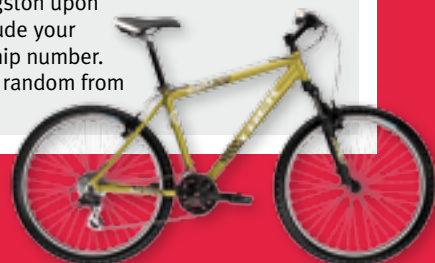
5. In the latter half of the 20th century which British Premier imposed the harshest anti-union laws in Europe?

- a. Winston Churchill
- b. Ted Heath
- c. Margaret Thatcher
- d. Tony Blair



HOW TO ENTER

To win a Trek 3900 mountain bike please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 30 September 2009 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (August/September 2009) FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.





StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

AssetCo managementspeak



The Cat doesn't yet know whether AssetCo plc is capable of running emergency fire crews.

But we do know that London's fire authority is about to pay it £12 million to do so (see page 4). And we know that if gallons of impenetrable managementspeak could put out fires, AssetCo's top brass would be able to do the job unaided.

Since managementspeak is designed to obscure the speaker's real meaning, the Cat offers possible translations of some of the most obscure phrases. It cannot be said with any certainty exactly what is meant, but then that is the idea.

Here's the first. AssetCo plc's chief executive John Shannon says he won the contract by "prioritising our efforts on those essential support services accountable for the highest proportion of our client's cost base." This translates roughly as: **"We went for the bits with the most money."**

Mr Shannon adds: "Our Integrated Support Services offering leaves us well placed to compete for other similar tenders," which means: "We're willing to take as much money off the fire service's hands as you're willing to throw at us."

"Business continuity arrangements" means putting out fires, and "the support of the MoD" means bringing in the army. I hope you're taking notes, there'll be a short test next issue.

But even the Cat can't work out what Mr Shannon means by "the business process-outsourcing field." Whatever "business process-outsourcing" may be, and whether or not it takes place in a field, the Cat is sure that it isn't one of the fire brigade's traditional tasks.

Someone should tell AssetCo plc before it's too late that what they are supposed to do is put out fires and rescue people.

And AssetCo is very generous with its money. **Why has it given the RFWHo £12,000 and what services were exchanged for this money?**

Dinners, lunch and a hamper



However, there's one aspect of the deal that needs no translation.

Guess who Mr Shannon entertained to two fine dinners and one splendid lunch between October

2007 and January 2009. It's the same person to whom he gave a £350 Harvey Nichols hamper in December 2008.

No, don't give up. I'll give you a clue. He chairs the London fire authority, and might have been a useful person to get to know if you wanted a lucrative contract from it.

Here's another clue: he pops up regularly in this column, most recently when he attacked a Liberal Democrat MP for calling out the fire service, though the firefighters who attended said she had done the right thing.

He said at that time: "It costs £250 per hour for a call out," but failed to mention that he charges the taxpayer £8,000 a year to ferry him round London in taxis. You're still not there? Look, he's a Tory, and he's a reactionary loud-mouthed berk.

Oh dear, you are slow today. His initials are BC, and that's positively the last clue the Cat is giving you. All right, his first name's Brian. Now you're on your own.

More grub-by scandals



And Councillor Brian C, who's also the Mayor of Barnet, is the lead actor in another grubby little scandal this month.

The hearing into a complaint against him is to be held in secret – and Brian gets £10,000 from the public purse to hire top lawyers who will defend him.

On Brian's figures, you could call out the fire service 40 times for that money. You could call it out 32 times for the money Brian charges in taxis.

To put it another way, **this politician has cost London at least 72 fire service callouts in expenses alone**, before we even start paying him for his services, or providing him with an office, secretarial staff and flunkies to pamper his gigantic ego.

Can London afford Councillor Brian Coleman? (All right, own up – you knew who it was all along, didn't you?).

Keeping up with Coleman



Not that Councillor Coleman is the only politician swallowing up resources which could be better used elsewhere.

Members of Berkshire Fire Authority have just awarded themselves a 400 per cent pay hike – on the same day that they turned

down pleas to keep Windsor Fire Station open at night, which they said would cost too much.

Firefighters and local campaigners say the closure could cost lives. **Each councillor on the fire authority will now cost £1,800 a year instead of £412** – and that's just the basic allowance: they also get new and improved mileage, subsistence and accommodation allowances.

The extra cost would keep Windsor Fire Station open at night. "We've been told it's to keep their allowances in line with fire authorities everywhere else," says the FBU's Berkshire brigade secretary Mark Stollery. That's a terrifying thought.

What do your fire authority members cost? And what else could they be doing with the money?

Answers please in the catflap: we'll print the most startling ones in this column.

Popper perfect



What's the one thing your fire station lacks? Don't all shout at once, the Cat knows what you're going to say. A popcorn machine! You need wait no longer. An enterprising American company, C. Cretors and Company, offers **"a small popper perfect for fire and police stations"** and they have sent their publicity material to the Cat because they think the story "may be a good fit for *Firefighter*."

To save their switchboard being jammed by firefighters desperate for a popcorn machine in their workplace, the Cat has decided to withhold the company's contact details.

Basket case



I nearly fall out of my cat basket at a story in the *Liverpool Daily Post*. I am distraught to find Michael Hagen described as "acting chief officer" in McGuirkieside. What's happened to the other one?

They can't do this to me. **I've started a Bring Back Tony petition in McGuirkieside** but, alas, it is still waiting for its first signature.

✂ if you have any snippets you think Station Cat should get his sharp claws into email: stationcat@fbu.org.uk

25-year badges



Pete Scott (r) White Watch, Southsea, receives his 25-year badge from Hampshire vice chair Nigel McCullen



Michael Williamson (centre) receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Marty Cooper (l) and chair Fraser Parr



Tony McDowell (centre) receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Marty Cooper (l) and chair Fraser Parr



Gordon Kinnear (centre) receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Marty Cooper (l) and chair Fraser Parr



Paul Temperley (r), White Watch, Southsea, receives his 25-year badge from Hampshire vice chair Nigel McCullen



Archie Douglas (centre) receives his 25-year badge from brigade secretary Marty Cooper (l) and chair Fraser Parr



Bob Mack (r), Wantage, receives his 25-year badge from Andy Middleton of Oxford branch



Neil Dorrington (r) receives his 25-year badge from Wrexham branch vice chair Grant Purvor



Paul Whybro (r), Wrexham, receives his 25-year badge from Wrexham branch secretary Richie Clutton



Alan Jones (2nd from left), Northwich, Cheshire receives his 25-year badge from branch chair Martin Morrow. Looking on: Andi McDonald (l) and Andy Watson



John Banfield (r), Wantage, receives his 25-year badge from Andy Middleton of Oxford Branch

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
o1rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 Northern Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
o2rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
o3rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
o4rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
o5rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
o6gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
o7rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
o8rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
o9rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Units A&B, Ground Floor,
219B Preston Road, Brighton BN1 6SA
01474 320473
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
FBU Regional Office, The Merlin Centre,
Unit L, Gatehouse Close, Aylesbury HP19 8DP
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Devon and Somerset, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS